

No. 16.

Price, Five Cents.

SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE STORIES FROM THE NOTE-BOOKS OF
FAMOUS CHIEFS OF POLICE

A PAPER GOLD MINE

or Sheridan Keene after Money Order Book 2409
BY ALDEN·F. BRADSHAW



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SHIELD WEEKLY



TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

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NEW YORK, March 23, 1901.

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A Paper Gold Mine;

OR,

SHERIDAN KEENE AFTER MONEY ORDER BOOK 2409.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

A SLICK COUNTRYMAN.

"Got enny pum'kin seeds?"

"Some excellent ones, Mr. Jenkins."

"Quart'll do, I reckon. An' you can stick in a half peck o' mixed clover along with 'em."

"Are your farming tools all in order, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Guess they'll run out this ere season, thankee. Might stick in a couple o' three-tine pitchforks, if yeou like."

"Two pitchforks, Mr. Jenkins; all right."

"How much tew own thet air harrer?"

"That harrow costs eighteen dollars, Mr. Jenkins, and it's worth the money. It will save you that in labor."

Mr. Jenkins stood motionless for several moments and surveyed the farm implement,

with his head canted to one side and a critical squint in his soft blue eyes.

And more guileless and winsome eyes never lighted a human face. Simplicity and innocence cried with mute eloquence from every feature of the countryman's countenance, and were plainly manifest in his every word and action.

It was in the big farm supply store of Ray & Brett. The clerks had winked slyly to one another when he entered, despite that countrymen were common enough there, particularly in the early Spring. And very likely these clerks would have poked a bit of innocent fun at him had it not been that Mr. Brett, the junior partner, had taken him in hand and was treating him with habitual grave courtesy.

Mr. Jenkins had entered the store about

half an hour before, and, being a stranger, had introduced himself.

Mr. Brett was much pleased to shake hands with the farmer from Salisbury, and more pleased to sell him even the small bill of goods which he since had purchased. He would have been thrice glad could he have sold him the harrow.

But Mr. Jenkins presently set down his colored carpetbag, pushed back the broad straw hat from his Websterian brow, and, raising his honest blue eyes to those of Mr. Brett, he said with rustic simplicity:

"No doubt she's wuth it, sir, but I reckon I can't stand the harrer. I dunno now but I've bought more'n I can pay fur. How much does she foot up?"

"Just \$18.28, Mr. Jenkins. Call it an even eighteen."

"Knock off the twenty-eight, eh? Thankee fur that, sir," Mr. Jenkins said, gratefully, while he fished out from deep down in his speckled waistcoat a huge leather wallet about the size of a boot-leg and spread it open upon one of the sales tables.

"Durned if I didn't come nigh furgittin' this!" he exclaimed, producing a slip of paper. "It's an order fur a bundle o' rakes, an' a wheelbarrow, from Zeb Perkins. His farm is next tew mine, an' when he heerd I was comin' tew town he ran over with this ere. He says he trades here, an' you'd send 'em along an' charge 'em to him."

"Oh, yes!" said Mr. Brett, glancing at the order. "Perkins is an old customer of ours. What is the trouble now?"

"Wal, durn me if I ain't short o' havin' eighteen dollars arter all," explained Mr. Jenkins, who had been counting the bank notes taken from his wallet. "I've only got thirteen, an' that's a thunderin' unlucky number. You'll hev tew cross off some o' them things I've bought, so's tew cut it down."

Mr. Brett did not fancy reducing the or-

der, and he rather wished to accommodate the simple countryman.

"We will send your order C. O. D., Mr. Jenkins, if you wish."

"Then it'll hev tew go by express, won't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thet'll cost tew much!" exclaimed the countryman, with a ludicrous grimace. "We've only got one express down ower way an' it soaks us tew the limit. I reckon you'd better slice the order down, sir."

"What have you there?"

"Thet air?" and Mr. Jenkins lifted his honest eyes to those of his hearer. "Thet air's a order on the postoffice here in Boston."

"Ah, a money order!"

"I reckon that's what they call 'em. Never hed one afore. Got this ere from my son Reuben, who runs a meat market out here a piece. He sort o' helps me an' Nancy out in the Spring. Farmin' don't pay much in the winter, yeou know."

Mr. Brett examined the money order.

It looked all right. It was issued by the M—— office upon that in Boston, and was made payable to Mr. Jenkins.

Mr. Brett was not averse to doing the countryman a kindness. He knew his next farm neighbor, Zebediah Perkins, and there was, of course, no question as to the honesty of Mr. Jenkins.

He said pleasantly:

"We will cash this for you, Mr. Jenkins, if you wish, and deduct the amount of your purchase."

"Can yer do that?" demanded Mr. Jenkins, with artless surprise.

"Certainly. This order is as good as a check. All you need do is to sign it over to us."

"Will I git all that's comin' to me?"

"Well, you will get the eighty-five dollars, less the amount of your bill," laughed Mr.

Brett. "That is all the money order calls for."

"An' thet'll save me huntin' up the post-office, won't it?"

"To be sure it will. You will have your money, and we shall include the order in our bank deposit."

"Thet air's good enough!" exclaimed Mr. Jenkins, with much satisfaction.

The countryman gathered up his huge wallet and his carpetbag and repaired with Mr. Brett to the office window. The latter showed him where to sign the money order, and Mr. Jenkins, with many facial contortions, affixed his scrawl of a signature to the note.

"I'm a durned sight handier with a hoe than a pen," he observed, surveying his writing with dubious eyes.

Mr. Brett laughed, gave him a receipted bill of his purchase, handed him the cash balance of the money order, then shook hands with him once more and accompanied him to the street door.

"Call upon us again when you are in town, Mr. Jenkins," he said, bidding him good day.

"Reckon I will, sir. An' you come tew see me when you're down my way. Good-by, sir."

And the countryman from Salisbury, with his straw hat and his carpetbag, wandered moderately away with the throng of moving people in busy Market street.

Mr. Brett smiled and returned to his sales-room.

Two hours later the cashier sent one of his clerks to the postoffice with a number of money orders to be cashed.

Among the number was the one given Mr. Brett by the countryman.

The postoffice clerk was about to cash that one with the others, when he suddenly caught his breath and darted a glance at the young man outside.

"Where did you get this?" the clerk asked, abruptly.

"It was in with the others," the youth answered, quickly. "Why, what's the matter with it?"

The clerk took a long look at it; then he left his seat and disappeared in the superintendent's office.

He returned presently and, thrusting the money order through the window, said, briefly:

"Here, Johnny, take this to your cashier, and tell him it's no good."

The young man gave vent to a low whistle and, passing out of the office, hastened toward the hardware store.

"Somethin's in the wind, all right," he exclaimed. "Eighty-five dollars. Gee! old man Brett got stuck bad this time, and by the old Reuben, too."

When he entered the store he found Mr. Brett and the cashier engaged with a man whom he subsequently learned was a post-office inspector. He had sprung into a cab immediately on being shown the money order and had reached the store some minutes ahead of the clerk.

What was it that had started him off so suddenly?

The money order was properly made out, properly signed and properly stamped. It looked just like any other money order. But up in one corner was something that set every fibre of his body tingling.

It was a number printed in red ink—2409.

That very day a general alarm had been sent out to every postoffice in the State which read:

"Look out for money order books 2409, 2410, 2411, 2412."

Later in the day Chief Watts and Sheridan Keene were discussing the case in company with Postoffice Inspector Henderson.

"One feature of this swindle, Detective

Keene, leads me to think that the notorious Johnny Guile may have had a hand in the job," Chief Inspector Watts was saying as the postoffice inspector rose from his chair in the chief's private office and started to take his departure.

"And who is Johnny Guile, chief?" he paused to ask, while buttoning his overcoat. "The name isn't at all familiar."

"Johnny Guile," replied Chief Watts, "is one of the slickest and most versatile swindlers just at present at large. Though still under thirty, he has done time for half the petty crimes in the calendar. As a confidence man he hasn't a peer. One of his cleverest impersonations is that of an innocent Reuben, by which he has swindled more unsuspecting merchants by one dodge or another than he has hairs in his head. And he isn't bald by any means," added the chief, with significant emphasis.

"You say he is now at large?"

"He was released from the Elmira prison six or eight months ago. He then pretended to have reformed, yet I rather have been expecting he soon might be heard from in some of his old tricks."

"What style of a man is he?"

"When he is at liberty, that would be a guess, for he makes himself up very cleverly," replied Chief Watts, laughing. "The last time I took him he was in petticoats, and he looked sweet enough to have captivated a Harvard freshman."

"Made up as a woman!" exclaimed Henderson.

"As a girl of nineteen or twenty," laughed the chief. "And he looked it, too."

"He must have very feminine features."

"When he is in stripes he is the most innocent looking convict one ever beheld," added the chief. "His large blue eyes are as soft as those of a girl, and he has the air of a little angel. He is a rascal, though, every

inch of him; and can pull the wool over the eyes of nine men out of ten whether they are on the lookout or not. That's Johnny Guile."

"I'll keep an eye open for such a man," nodded Henderson, and with a bow in the direction of Sheridan Keene he made his departure.

"And he would stand about as good a chance of landing Johnny Guile as my aunt would!" dryly exclaimed Chief Watts, when the door had closed. "Guile would give him cards and spades and then take his money."

"Henderson evidently doesn't rank very high in your estimation, chief," laughed Keene.

"Not as a detective," was the reply. "He is not sufficiently quick witted. I think, Keene, since this affair has been brought to my notice, that you had better run out to the postoffice in M—— and see what you can quietly discover."

"Shall I go at once?"

"The sooner the better. You need not bother Henderson in any way, nor even inform him that you are looking into the case; but if, as I rather suspect, Johnny Guile has had a hand in this job, a much better man than Henderson should be after him."

"I'll go out there by the first train," said Sheridan Keene, quickly rising.

"And look sharp for such a man as I have described," added Chief Watts, with a significant headshake. "Should you run him into a corner at any time, moreover, keep your eye on him every instant."

"Is he dangerous?" inquired Keene, briefly turning back.

"Yes," replied the chief, shortly. "He is as desperate a little devil, when he fears that he is cornered, as ever pulled a gun. Handle him without gloves, mark you, if it ever comes to a show down."

"I'll bear it in mind, Chief Watts," bowed Keene, as he departed to begin his work on

the case, little dreaming how quickly he was to strike the trail, or into what perils it was destined to lead him.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRETTY MONEY ORDER CLERK.

Instead of going at once to M——, the postoffice from which the fraudulent money order had been issued, Sheridan Keene hastened to the money order division of the Boston office and procured from the superintendent, by whom he was well known, the duplicate advice which had been received at the Boston office.

Ordinarily the clerk's writing on this advice is a fac simile of that upon the money order, the two being written at once by means of the manifold process.

It was nearly five o'clock when the detective entered the postoffice in M——. The carriers were about leaving to deliver their last mail for the day.

"Is Postmaster Oliver here?" asked Keene, stepping to the general delivery window.

"He is in the carriers' sorting-room just now," replied a young man clerk. "I'll call him here, if you say so."

"Do so, please."

At the rear was the carriers' room mentioned, separated from the back portion of the main office by a broad doorway. The rear half of the large main floor was devoted to general sorting and making up of the mails for delivery to the wagons. In front were the money order and registered letter division, caged in with brass wirework reaching nearly to the ceiling; also the general delivery department and boxes, the postmaster's private section, railed off from the rest, and the outer public room.

Keene barely had fixed these features in mind when an elderly man approached the window, saying nervously:

"I am the postmaster, sir. Do you wish to see me personally?"

"In your private office, if you please," said Keene, displaying his badge.

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Mr. Oliver, "I'll admit you by yonder door."

Keene went to the side door indicated, and was immediately admitted to the postmaster's railed inclosure.

"I have called to investigate a money order said to have been fraudulently issued from this office," he explained, taking a chair.

"But Mr. Henderson has already been out here upon that business."

"That will make no difference," rejoined Keene. "He is one of the postoffice inspectors. I am from the headquarters in Pember-ton Square, and my name is Sheridan Keene. I wish only to learn the facts as far as they are known."

"They may be briefly stated, Detective Keene."

"So much the better."

"The money order, however, was not issued from this office."

"You surprise me. It bears the office name and date stamp."

"That is true, sir, but nothing was known of the order at this office until to-day."

"What are the facts?"

"The money order book, which is No. 2409, was never opened in this office; it was stolen from our safe some time since the first of this month."

"When did you find this out?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"You don't mean that the thief still has the book of money orders!" exclaimed Keene.

"I mean more even than that. He has not only book No. 2409, but also three others."

"Good heavens! Is it possible? That gives the case a decidedly more serious aspect."

"Serious indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Oliver, wiping from his brow the perspiration brought there by the mere thought of his

misfortune. "Are you aware, Detective Keene, how these order books are made?"

"They are issued by the department in Washington in books of two hundred, I understand."

"Precisely, sir; and they come to the offices sealed in brown paper and stamped with their numbers. About six weeks ago my supply of books ran low and I made a requisition upon the department for some more."

"And you received them?"

"On the first of the month we received ten books, sealed as usual, and they were deposited in the office safe."

"Is that where they are usually kept?"

"Certainly."

"Yet four have been stolen, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"And not missed?"

"They would have been missed but for one fact."

"What is that?"

"They occupied a small compartment of the safe, necessitating the piling of a part of these books back of the others. The thief was sufficiently cunning to leave the front tier of books intact, and as neither of my clerks nor myself have had occasion to remove any of them, we naturally did not discover the theft."

"Who ordinarily has access to the safe?"

"My money order clerk, Miss Harvey, and the two male clerks in the general delivery department."

"What are their names?"

"Frank Fay and John Parsons."

"How long have they been in the service here?"

"About two and five years, respectively."

"And Miss Harvey?"

"About four months."

"Give me the home address of all three, please."

Keene entered them in his notebook, then added:

"Give me also the numbers of the three stolen books besides 2409."

Mr. Oliver readily complied, and the detective, looking up quite sharply, observed:

"Then, Mr. Oliver, as each of these books contains two hundred order blanks, the thief has or had a total of eight hundred, each of which might be filled out for one hundred dollars and possibly cashed."

"That is the lamentable situation, Detective Keene."

"Making a total of eighty thousand dollars."

"Precisely."

"I should say it was a serious case," said Keene, bluntly. "Hundreds of people, merchants, brokers, even the banks, may be victimized, unless these thieves can be apprehended and the books recovered. Mr. Oliver, have you any reason to suspect any person in this office of having removed the books?"

"Not one, sir!" exclaimed Oliver, with genuine fervor.

"How many carriers have you?"

"Sixteen."

"Is your safe where they could easily get at it without being observed?"

"It would be possible, providing the office clerks were busily engaged."

"As a matter of fact, then, it is possible that any employee of this office may be guilty."

Keene's brow had become clouded. Compared with what he had anticipated, the case was assuming gigantic proportions. Out of nearly twenty employees it might indeed prove difficult to fix upon the guilty one.

"Yes, as a matter of fact."

"I wish to visit your money order department, Mr. Oliver."

"Certainly; step round this way."

Keene followed him round by the general delivery window, casting a passing glance at the clerk, and entered the cage adjoining.

"This is Miss Harvey, the money order clerk," said the postmaster. "This is Detective Keene, of the Boston police, Miss Harvey. He wishes to see the safe from which the books were stolen; he is here to make an investigation."

"Well, I do hope, Mr. Keene, that you will quickly discover the thieves!" exclaimed the girl, acknowledging the introduction.

"I hope so, too."

"My own integrity, you see, sir, is seriously involved, and the incident has made me dreadfully nervous. I shall pray hourly for your success."

And Miss Harvey flashed a fervent glance at the detective from out the depths of her soft blue eyes.

They were innocent and winsome eyes, and the girl was decidedly pretty. Her face was round, with a pretty pink and white complexion; her luxuriant hair was a glorious auburn; and her figure, rather over the medium height, was finely developed.

She was just the style of girl to easily catch the men; and Keene, when he observed the solicitous glance of Mr. Oliver, on hearing her remark, decided that this elderly postmaster was more or less smitten with the fascinating charms of his money order clerk.

"Nellie takes the affair seriously at heart," he observed to Keene, in an explanatory way. "Yet I'll stake my own reputation upon her innocence."

"Miss Harvey looks just the opposite of a thief," returned Keene, bowing in a complimentary way to the blushing girl. "Is this the safe from which the books were stolen?"

"Yes, sir," said Nellie Harvey, drawing nearer, while Keene made the examination.

It was a large square safe set in the wall, and with its door opening into the cage.

"It would not have been easy for any of the carriers to have entered the cage during business hours, would it, Miss Harvey?" inquired Keene.

"No, sir; not easy!" explained the girl. "Yet I sometimes am obliged to be absent for a few minutes, and it then might be possible for a carrier to slip in here for a moment without being observed."

"Have you ever noticed any of the carriers to have a tendency to loiter near the cage?"

"Oh, no, sir; never!"

"Where is the money order book you now are using?"

"Here on my desk."

Keene turned to the high desk, and, drawing from his pocket the advice obtained at the Boston office, he spread it open beside the money order book which Nellie Harvey pushed toward him.

"It is very evident," he presently observed; "that the writing on the fraudulent order is not like yours, Miss Harvey."

"Oh, you are comparing them!" the girl exclaimed, with interest.

"Certainly," said Keene, looking up to meet her inquiring blue eyes.

"Why, surely it is not like mine," she replied. "I never so much as saw order book No. 2409."

"I presume not."

"It never was taken from its wrapper while in this office; at least, not to my knowledge."

"And you most likely would have known, if it had been," smiled Keene, meeting her gaze with a look as artless as her own.

"If you please, Mr. Oliver," he added, with an air of indifference; "I would like to take this book to your desk for a few moments."

"There is no objection to that, Detective Keene."

Nellie Harvey looked the least bit surprised, but Keene immediately withdrew with the money order book then in use in the office, and took a seat at the postmaster's private desk.

"If you please, Mr. Oliver, I would like to remain alone while I am making a further

examination of this book," he said, with a courteous firmness.

It was the postmaster's turn to look surprised. Despite his interest in Keene's investigation, however, he offered no objection, but bowed and withdrew to another part of the office.

Keene glanced back over his shoulder.

From where he sat, he could be seen from only one side of the rear part of the office; and that part contained one feature already noted by the detective, which he suspected might be resorted to by any person secretly anxious to watch his movements. It was the set bowl and towel rack, which served for the office lavatory, with a mirror affixed upon the wall back of it.

Seating himself with his back in that direction, as if he had no interest there, Keene fixed in the palm of his left hand a small mirror, about the size of a silver dollar, and so held it that he could see the reflection of the washbowl, or of any person who might visit it.

Then he drew from his pocket a powerful magnifying glass, and fell to studying the office and date mark, which is fixed with a circular rubber stamp upon both the order and advice issued from each money order office.

At the end of five minutes he discovered that the capital letter of the town name in the stamp had a very slight imperfection, as if the edge of the letter in the rubber stamp had been slightly cut or worn. The imperfection was not incidental to a single impression, but appeared invariably in the impressions upon the book then in use.

Keene next examined the impression on the advice brought from Boston.

It presented the same identical defect.

"So, so!" he said to himself, with a thrill of satisfaction. "I strike a clew, do I? One thing is now comparatively certain—whether

the fraudulent order was written here or not, it at least was stamped by some person in this office. There is some one here who requires watching."

Although he had completed his comparison of the book and the fraudulent advice, Detective Keene continued to bend motionless before the postmaster's desk, with the mirror still held in his palm.

Five more minutes passed.

Then a quick, sprightly step sounded across the floor at the rear.

In another moment the reflection of a figure showed in the tiny mirror.

It was that of a girl.

Nell Harvey had crossed the office and was at the bowl.

Ostensibly she was merely washing her hands. But not for a moment while she stood there did the gaze of her innocent blue eyes leave the mirror in front of her, in which she too was watching a reflection—that of Detective Sheridan Keene, still bending studiously over the postmaster's desk, with the girl's every move reflected from the glass in his hand.

At the end of two minutes Nell Harvey returned to the cage.

At the end of two more minutes Detective Keene rejoined her and the postmaster there, and returned the money order book.

"What do you find, sir?" demanded Mr. Oliver, with immediate interest.

"Nothing at all significant," said Keene. "It appears to be very evident that this fraudulent order was prepared outside of your office, Mr. Oliver."

"Oh, Detective Keene, I am so glad to hear you say that, at least!" exclaimed Miss Harvey, with a warm flash of her eyes in his direction.

"No doubt you are!" smiled Sheridan Keene, with a complacent bow.

And, as a matter of fact, he had no doubt of it.

But he was too shrewd to reveal his suspicions thus early in the game.

He bade them both a courteous good-day, and made his departure.

CHAPTER III.

A PAPER GOLD MINE.

It was nearly six o'clock when Sheridan Keene left the post-office, and he rightly inferred that Nell Harvey's duties would end at that hour, and that she would soon depart.

About five minutes after six she emerged alone, wearing a broad hat bedecked with red roses, while her outer garment was a tight jacket which set off to advantage her attractive figure.

"Very fly, indeed!" said Keene to himself. "She certainly is worth the watching."

She scarce had set foot upon the sidewalk before she sighted the detective on the opposite side of the street.

Keene had made sure that she should. He wanted to see how she would act in case she felt herself under suspicion.

Yet he pretended not to observe her. He appeared to be staring into a store window.

The girl frowned slightly when she noticed him, then started off up Main street.

"Why is the fool waiting there?" she muttered, glancing back over her shoulder. "Does he hope to corner me? If he does, he'll get finely left, or my name isn't Johnny Guile!"

Chief Watts was right when he said that Johnny Guile was one of the cleverest in the business. His makeup as Miss Nell Harvey was perfection itself. He looked as pretty as a picture, and as innocent as the daughter of a Methodist minister.

It was indeed a desperately clever fellow, who could prepare himself in prison to pass the civil service examinations, and after emerging from the Elmira jail finally secure his present situation in the postal service

and deceive men and women alike as to his sex.

And although the party in the tight jacket and dashing hat was indeed the notorious swindler and criminal, Johnny Guile, he will, for the sake of convenience, at present be referred to in the character assumed.

Another backward glance told Miss Harvey that Keene was following on the opposite side.

Then she dove into a jewelry store and purchased a hat pin.

Keene stopped across the street to gaze at the antics of two bull puppies playing in a barber's window.

When Miss Harvey emerged from the store she carried her handkerchief in her hand; and before she reached the next corner she made a rapid sign with it, and a man standing on the curbing abruptly turned and disappeared down the side street.

"He was waiting for her," Keene instantly decided; "and she gave him warning. Hello! she is going to call me down."

Miss Harvey had turned sharply at the corner, and was crossing the street.

Then she came toward the detective, bowing and smiling as if surprised at seeing him.

Keene immediately stopped her, politely raising his hat.

"Which is the nearest way to the railway station, Miss Harvey?" he inquired. "I am somewhat turned around."

"Down the next side street," she replied, with one of her innocent smiles. "It will take you straight to the station."

"Thank you."

"I do hope, sir, you will soon be able to arrest those thieves."

"I have no doubt of it, Miss Harvey," nodded Keene, affably, as they parted.

"Guess again!" was the mental comment of the other.

She waited until Keene had turned the

corner, then put the boot on the other leg and followed him.

Keene was too cunning to look back. While wiping his brow with his handkerchief as he walked he again resorted to his mirror, and discovered that the girl was fifty feet behind him, watching his every movement.

Entering the station, Keene at once bought a ticket for Boston, and boarded the first train.

Then Miss Harvey was satisfied that he meant what he had said, and really had returned to the city.

But Sheridan Keene left the train at the first stop, and took an electric car back to M—.

It was dark when he arrived, and close upon eight o'clock.

He at once inquired the way to Elm street, where he had been informed by the postmaster that Miss Harvey had lodgings.

He had no difficulty in finding the house, and he strongly suspected that she would have a caller that evening—the man to whom she had given warning a little earlier. The circumstance alone was sufficient to warrant this suspicion.

From the opposite side of the street Keene made a survey of the house. It was a two-story wooden dwelling, with a yard and garden at the rear. There was a light in the hall, but one room only was illumined, that of the second floor back.

Crossing the street Keene peered through the narrow windows at either side of the front door.

Miss Harvey's jacket and hat hung upon the rack against the wall.

"She's at home right enough," said Keene to himself. "Now to discover if she is alone."

The side of the house offered him no advantage. Seeking the rear yard, however,

he discovered that one of the chamber curtains was raised an inch or two from the sash.

Five feet below the windows was a shed, or porch, with a slanting roof. Rising to the break of this roof there was a wooden trellis, covered with a luxuriant grape-vine.

"The very thing," muttered Keene. "It is a chance that invites discovery, but I must know who is in that room."

Moving with exceeding caution, he mounted the trellis and gained the roof of the porch. Creeping up over the shingles he reached the main body of the house, and found that, by holding fast to the window casing, he could stand erect and look into the room.

The chamber contained the very parties Keene had anticipated—Nell Harvey and the man Keene had seen leave the street corner when the girl flirted her handkerchief.

The chamber door was closed, and the two occupants of the room, evidently aware of being alone in the house, were speaking in ordinary tones, sufficiently loud to be overheard by the detective.

But Johnny Guile had not removed his disguise. He was too clever to take chances of an interruption, and of his sex being unexpectedly discovered.

Among the first words to reach the ears of the detective was the mention of his own name.

"Oh, the man was Sheridan Keene right enough!" Miss Harvey was exclaiming. "He gave Oliver his name, and I know him by reputation. I didn't dare chance speaking to you on the street, lest he should make a mark of you also. So I gave you the tip to vamoose."

"Do you think he has tumbled to anything?" demanded the other.

He was a short, stocky young man, with a smooth face and sharp gray eyes, and his

features indicated that he was an Irishman. His name was Terrance Malloy.

"There is little doubt that he has discovered something," was the reply; "but I have not yet learned what."

"You think he suspects you?"

"Why should he have shadowed me, if not? Yes, he surely has tumbled upon something."

"What do you mean to do about it?"

"Hang to my position in the office, of course, until I find out just where we stand," was the decisive rejoinder. "I am not afraid of him."

"But you are taking the chance of arrest," protested Malloy.

"There's little danger of that just yet," was the reply. "Keene will not arrest me alone. I am on to all the moves of this fly detective, and he will plan to make me the cat's paw by which he can locate the rest of the gang, and recover the stolen money order books. What would be the good of arresting me alone? He'd know I would not betray the others."

"There is something in that," nodded Malloy, approvingly.

"Sure there is! The recovery of the stolen money orders is of more account than nailing me, never doubt that. We have nearly eight hundred of them, Terry, and it will be like child's play to get cash for them. We cannot hope to work the offices much, as I at first thought, for the department in Washington is already sending out warning cards."

"Well, what can we do?"

"We can work them off on the merchants, and that's a cinch."

"Sure; that is true enough," laughed Malloy.

"Eight hundred orders, say at fifty each, would run up to forty thousand dollars, and that's a good bit of money to divide among

three of us. No, no, Terry, don't lose your heart. We have a paper gold mine in this, which even Sheridan Keene shall not corner. We will do him up for good and all before we will suffer that to come off."

"Oh, I am not losing heart," cried Malloy, with grim disapproval. "I am only asking what's to be done, now that the game is fairly started and suspected."

Clever Miss Harvey swung her chair nearer the table and bent her animated gaze on the man opposite.

"I'll tell you what's to be done," she said, curtly. "Bill still has the money-order book, hasn't he?"

"Sure he has."

"And is still located at the old stand?"

"He'll not leave there till you say. That was the plan."

"And he will stick to it fast enough," nodded Miss Harvey. "And to-morrow morning you had better jump this town, which is becoming a trifle warm, and run down to Salem. Later in the day I'll drop you a line, telling you what turns up and what you are to do."

"Will you stay here?"

"I shall remain in the post-office as long as I feel safe in doing so," was the prompt reply. "I want to learn just what Sheridan Keene has discovered, that I may know how best to head him off. He is the man we have most to fear, for Henderson don't cut any ice at all."

"Will you write me soon?"

"Not later than to-morrow, and in case anything turns up."

"And Bill?"

"I'll keep him informed also. So long as he has the money orders, there'll be no danger of my arrest; of that I am certain. I shall hold my position in the office till I think it grows too hot, and then make tracks for parts unknown."

"And I am to hear from you to-morrow or the next day?" demanded Malloy, half-doubtfully.

"You surely will, I tell you. And you'd better be going, now, lest some of the family return and find you here."

Malloy rose to his feet and took his hat, and his companion accompanied him as far as the street door.

Keene decided that he had nothing more to learn then and there, and that there was less danger of discovery if he departed before the girl returned. Cautiously making his way down the slippery roof, he safely reached the yard, and departed over the back fence.

He already had decided by what plan he might locate the party called Bill, who evidently was the present custodian of the stolen money orders, the recovery of which was indeed of the greatest importance.

But the best laid schemes both of criminals and detectives sometimes go amiss.

When Johnny Guile opened his back window next morning, the first thing to catch his eye was the torn grape-vine at the edge of the shed roof; and closer inspection of the roof at once revealed the scratches of nails in the shingles, evidently made by the nails in the heels of a man's boots.

The scoundrel's face underwent a mighty change, and for a moment a look like that of murder itself showed in his dilating eyes. Then a malicious grin broke the expression of ominous hatred.

"So he played it on me, did he?" he growled, under his breath. "And he came back here to pipe me off! It's lucky I undressed in the dark! A very clever game, Mr. Keene, but I'll pay you back in your own coin, my man, never doubt that!"

Since he had not been immediately arrested, he did not fear arrest; and he made himself up as usual, and at the customary hour started for the post-office.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TABLES TURNED.

As Johnny Guile had surmised, Sheridan Keene had no idea of arresting any person through whom, if left at liberty, he might locate and recover the stolen money orders. To recover these, and thereby prevent the swindling of perhaps hundreds of uninformed merchants, if not even an occasional careless or forgetful postmaster, was first of chief importance.

Keene now believed that, if he could alarm Nell Harvey into mailing a letter to her confederate who then had the money order books in his keeping, their recovery and the arrest of the man could be quickly and quietly effected. The arrest of Nell Harvey and Malloy could be accomplished later.

He did not for a moment suspect that his eavesdropping of the previous night had been discovered. Nor did he for an instant imagine that Nell Harvey was the notorious Johnny Guile, a man whose shrewdness was nearly equal to his own, and who already suspected the very step the detective was about to take.

It was about ten o'clock when Keene entered the post-office, and he at once approached the money-order window.

"Good-morning, Miss Harvey," he called, on observing the latter at her desk.

She came down off the high stool and quickly joined him at the window.

"Do you bring me good news?" she asked, with a display of eagerness that would have deceived the hundredth man. "Have the stolen money orders been recovered?"

"Not yet; but they soon will be," replied Keene, with an air of conviction.

"Do you mean it?"

"Indeed, I do! I ran out here this morning merely to learn if any more orders from the stolen books have been cashed in this locality."

"There have been none reported to me."

"Is the postmaster about?"

"He has gone to Boston to meet the post-office inspectors."

"That's so? Then I'll not be able to see him."

"Not unless you wait until he returns."

"I don't believe I'll do that."

"Is there anything private about this business?" demanded the clerk, with an air of coquetry. "What's been discovered that makes you think the stolen books will be recovered so soon?"

It was the very question Keene had expected, and for which he was waiting.

And Johnny Guile knew well enough that it was; and that, when Keene answered it, he should learn just what evidence had been actuating the detective in shadowing him.

"There is nothing so private that you may not know," replied Keene, artfully, returning the other's seductive glance. "But you had better keep the facts to yourself, Miss Harvey."

"Oh, I can keep a secret, if I am a woman."

"It is no work of mine, nor at all to my credit," explained Keene, joining in her laugh.

"Whose, then?"

"The credit belongs to Henderson."

"The post-office inspector?"

"Yes. The one who was out here yesterday."

"Is that so? He struck me as being a blockhead. What, in Heaven's name, did he discover?"

"I've not got all of the particulars, for there is more or less jealousy between us detectives," Keene carelessly rejoined, never losing the expression of his hearer's eyes. "But Henderson discovered when out here that the fraudulent order was stamped and dated by some one in this office."

"Impossible!"

And for an instant a look of genuine fear showed in Johnny Guile's blue eyes.

"It's a fact, so Henderson claims," asserted Keene.

"Can he prove it?"

"So he says."

"But how? If he can do that, he should be able to make an arrest."

"He expects to do so this afternoon."

"Do you know whom?"

"I don't," and Keene shook his head. "As I said before, there is some jealousy among us, and we don't tell all we know."

"Don't you know why he is so sure the order was stamped here?"

"I believe he discovered some imperfection in the stamp, Miss Harvey, which appears both in the order book here in use, and in the cashed money order stolen from book 2409."

"Funny you should not have discovered that as well as Henderson!"

"I am not as clever as Henderson," returned Keene, with equal dryness.

"Oh, indeed!" was the laughing rejoinder. "I'd never have dreamed that. Has he learned anything more?"

"He has discovered that the stolen books are now in the keeping of a man somewhere in the suburbs, and claims he can lay hands on him at the proper time. I don't know how much truth there is in it, Miss Harvey," added the detective, as he turned to go; "but I think without doubt that arrests will be made this afternoon."

"I hope so, I am sure!"

"My regards to Mr. Oliver."

"Thanks."

The last was said with a smile, as Keene bowed himself from the office; but the smile became a vicious grin, which developed into a scowl of bitterest malice, before Johnny Guile had resumed his seat at the high desk in the money-order cage.

"So there was a crook in the stamp, eh!" he said to himself, sitting with his elbows on the desk and his brows knit in an ugly frown.

"And he would have me think Henderson made the discovery, would he? He is just about laying to locate the stolen books through some act of mine. Probably a letter to Bill. Well, well, I'll not disappoint him, the fool!"

"Just the same, he has made this office too hot for comfort, and I think I'll up stakes and light out before I find myself with bracelets on instead of bangles. But I'll first even up accounts with Sheridan Keene, the infernal meddler!"

He took a pen, drew a block of paper under his hand, and began to write.

Sheridan Keene, meantime, rang at the door of a house on the opposite corner, from the side window of which the side windows of the post-office could be easily seen.

"I am a Boston detective," he explained to the woman who answered his ring. "I wish to watch the movements of a person in the post-office, who is suspected of robbing the mails, and I would like the privilege of doing so from one of your side rooms for a brief time if you please."

"I do not know that I have any objection," the woman replied, yet regarding him rather suspiciously.

Then Keene displayed his badge, which evidently had an effect, and he was admitted to a side parlor.

Through the lace draperies he could see across to the post-office, and without being seen in turn.

The pretty money-order clerk still was seated at the desk, busily writing.

At the end of ten minutes she came down off the stool, and hastened to drop a letter in the mail pouch for which a wagon at the door was at that moment waiting.

"It is for the express into Boston!" Keene exclaimed to himself.

Hurriedly leaving the house, he waited until the mail wagon had turned the corner and was out of view from the post-office, when he hailed the driver.

"Take me aboard, my man," he commanded.

"Can't do it, sir."

"But you must do it," persisted Keene, making himself known. "I am at present in the mail service, and after a letter thief. So move along there and make room for me."

This put a different complexion on the request, and Keene was allowed to ride.

At the station he boarded the mail car along with the pouch of mail, and stated his business to the railway postal clerk.

"Can you get that pouch open and find a letter for me before the train leaves?" he further demanded.

"Hardly, sir! They are ringing off already. We are express into Boston."

And Johnny Guile had known this train to be an express; and believed that Keene, once away on it, could not return for at least a couple of hours. In that time, he had decided he could safely jump the town.

"Open up the pouch, then," commanded Keene, as the train started. "I'll find the letter during the run in."

Although the mail was not heavy, it required some little time for him to fix upon the letter desired. He had no address save the name Bill, or William; and no means of identifying the letter except by the writing of the money-order clerk, which he had seen in the order book at the post-office.

But he found in the mail five letters addressed to men named William, and the superscription on one of these was undoubtedly in the writing of Nell Harvey.

The letter was addressed to William Bloodsoe, Newburyport, Mass.

"You're taking a chance in opening that, Detective Keene," observed the clerk, when Keene started to break open the seal.

"If I am in error, we can put it in another envelope and readdress it," was the reply. "You can bear witness to my motive in opening it."

And without further argument Keene broke the seal.

Quickly drawing out the folded sheet, he glanced first at the signature.

It was the name he expected—Nell Harvey. Then he began at the top of the page and read:

"MY DEAR MR. SHERIDAN KEENE:

"What a very clever detective you are! You really ought to have a medal hung on you where every one might see it. It's a wonder to me why the steamboats and locomotives don't whistle your name. You and Henderson are peas from the same pod. You are as soft as a ripe tomato. If you fell down, your skin would open and you would all run out.

"When you next play the 'Peeping Tom' at a lady's bed-room window, take off your shoes, so the nails will not scrape the shed roof. Take a run down to Newburyport, Mr. Keene, and look up Mr. Bill Bloodsoe. If you can find him, clap the darbies on him and run him in. If you cannot locate him, wire for me and I'll come to help you. I know where he is, or some other Bill!"

"Should you come this way again, my dear Mr. Keene, run in and see me—if you can find me. But don't try to queer my little game with the money orders. If you do, and we chance to meet, take heed that you pull your gun quicker than I pull mine. If you fail to do so, the pastor of your church will have occasion to say what he thinks of you, and you'll give him no back talk."

"Really, my dear Mr. Keene, you're too soft! I think you would even cash a money order numbered 2409. I presume you hereafter will become my foe, instead of friend; and I am yours,

NELL HARVEY."

CHAPTER V.

QUICK WORK.

Although it did not tell him that she was a man in disguise, Sheridan Keene did not require the help of a college professor to appreciate the full significance of Nell Harvey's intensely sarcastic letter.

It told him how he had been duped. It told him that his espionage of the night before had been discovered, and that the letter by which he had hoped to accomplish so much was only a colossal hoax and taunt. And it told him not only that he was up against a person of consummate boldness and cunning, but also one who would not shrink even from taking his life, if the occasion should require it.

Aside from its startling significance, the sarcastic tone of the letter was sufficient to spur the most resentful and resolute part of Keene's nature.

With his cheeks grown slightly pale from suppressed rage, and with a very ugly fire leaping up in his dark eyes, he crushed the letter into his pocket.

"Was it what you expected?" demanded the startled railway clerk.

"It was a deal more than I expected!" cried Keene, rushing to the car window to look out.

The train was speeding at about forty miles an hour through a suburban district, and approaching the outskirts of the next town.

Turning sharply about, Keene sprang up and caught the signal line to the locomotive, and gave it a violent jerk.

"Here, here," cried the clerk; "what are you doing?"

"Slowing down the train," thundered Keene, above the noise of the wheels.

"You must not do that!"

"Must not, perhaps! But I have!" cried Keene, clinging fast to the line to prevent the

conductor from reversing the signal. "I must leave this train, and I mean to do it!"

The signal already was being answered, and the train was slowing down.

Without waiting to offer further argument or explanation, Keene dashed out to the rear platform of the car.

In a moment more he felt it safe to make the jump from the steps, and at the same moment the amazed conductor appeared through the door of the baggage-car.

Keene threw back his coat and displayed his badge, at the same time crying loudly:

"It was a case of necessity, conductor. There's a dangerous criminal in M——, and I must return. Let her go, sir!"

With the last, and a nod to the road official, Keene leaped from the moving train and landed safely in the roadbed.

The conductor signaled the train to go on; then leaned out over the iron guard-gate and waved his hand to the detective, a salute which Keene heartily returned.

This was a move which even Johnny Guile, with all his cleverness, had not anticipated.

"If she imagines me so soft," said Keene to himself, still supposing his daring opponent to be a woman, "I'll speedily give her occasion to change her mind."

Hastening across a strip of meadow he gained the street, and started for the nearest house having a stable adjoining.

He found a young man in the yard engaged in grooming a horse.

"Hitch up that animal at once and take me to M——," Keene cried, peremptorily. "It's a case of life and death."

The young man looked surprised, but quickly took in the explanation made by the detective, and did what the latter commanded.

It required but a few moments to harness the horse into a light buggy, and with the young man by his side Keene soon was rid-

ing furiously over the road toward the town from which he so recently had departed.

"How long a drive is it?" he asked.

"About four miles."

"And how soon can you make it?"

"In about fifteen minutes, sure."

"Are you acquainted in the town?"

"Oh, yes; I used to live there."

"Take me straight to the post-office."

"All right, sir."

The young man was a good as his word. In precisely fifteen minutes he drew down the reeking horse at the post-office door.

"Wait here for me," said Keene; "I may want you again."

"All right, sir."

Keene sprang down to the sidewalk and dashed up the steps. It was precisely forty minutes since he had left by the same door, and fell to watching Nell Harvey from the window of the opposite house.

As he entered the office Keene saw a young man, instead of the person he had hoped was in the money-order cage. Hastening to the window he demanded hurriedly:

"Where is Miss Harvey?"

The clerk of course had no suspicion of what had occurred.

"She stepped out a while ago, sir; but only to do an errand," he replied.

"How long ago?"

"Possibly half an hour."

"See if she has taken any orders from the book in use."

"Good Heavens, sir! You don't suspect——"

"Do what I tell you," Keene sharply interrupted.

The clerk excitedly obeyed.

"Yes," he presently cried; "she has filled out four orders."

"Are you sure?"

"Positively! There has been no person at

this window this morning, sir; but there are four orders missing under to-day's date."

"Wire at once to the offices on which the orders are drawn," commanded Keene. "See if the rubber office stamp is here?"

"No, sir; that also is missing."

"And you'll find that the girl is missing, too," cried Keene, bluntly. "Notify Oliver the moment he returns."

Without waiting to learn more, he hurriedly left the office and rejoined the young man in the waiting vehicle.

"Take me to Elm street, No. 71," he commanded; "and don't spare your horse."

"The horse can stand it, sir."

"Do you know the street?"

"Very well, sir."

It was a drive of less than ten minutes, and the moment they arrived at the house Keene sprang down and rang the doorbell.

Johnny Guile was there, still made up as Nell Harvey, and was in his room securing from his trunk such articles as he wished to carry away with him.

But this clever swindler was always on the alert. The moment he heard the wheels outside, he suspected something wrong. Darting into the front chamber he looked down and saw Sheridan Keene as he left the carriage.

Most men would have taken a chance of escape by the back window—but not Johnny Guile. His daring was superb and his audacity was magnificent.

Though he turned slightly pale, there was an ugly look in his eyes; and without a moment's hesitation he ran back to his room, and began stripping off his dress.

At the same moment the ring of the doorbell sounded through the house.

It was answered by the landlady, a slender little woman of good reputation, and whose name was Cabot.

"Is Miss Harvey here in the house, madam?" Keene at once demanded.

To his great surprise and satisfaction, Mrs. Cabot replied:

"Yes, sir, she is in her room. This is an unusually early hour—"

But Keene did not wait to hear her out. Turning quickly to his friend in the buggy, he cried, sharply:

"Come down here, young man! Run out back there and watch the rear chamber windows. If you see any one leaving by them, sing out to me at once."

The youth nodded understandingly, and started for the back yard.

"What's amiss, sir?" cried Mrs. Cabot. "I hope Miss Harvey has not done anything wrong."

"Oh, no, not a thing!" Keene dryly exclaimed, as he entered the hall and closed the front door. "Go up to her room and tell her she's wanted down here."

"But, sir—"

"Or, better still, I'll go myself!"

And the detective started up the stairs, three at a time.

But only to run almost into the arms of Miss Harvey, who at that moment was descending to meet him.

Now, however, Miss Harvey had changed her dress. She was in a loose, *négligée* wrapper, and her luxuriant auburn hair was hanging down her back. From below the edge of her skirts, peeped a tolerably well-shaped foot, without even a stocking to cover its nakedness.

"Oh, dear me, Mr. Keene!" she exclaimed, looking down at him with an indescribable smile of mingled surprise and amusement. "How you startled me! Is it indeed you?"

Keene drew back down the stairs, laughing with grim satisfaction.

"Yes, it is I, Miss Harvey!" he returned, with a curt display of enjoyment not easily suppressed. "Come down here!"

"But really, sir, I am not fit to be seen!"

"Don't let that embarrass you, my clever young lady. I have seen women in wrappers before. Come down here, I say."

"Why, certainly, if you insist," she smiled, archly, as she came part way down the stairs. "Did you get my letter, Mr. Keene?"

"Yes, I got it."

"Wasn't it nice?"

"Very," returned Keene, with his eyes never leaving her, for he remembered her threat. "Come down here, all the way."

"Please don't be hard on me, Mr. Keene," she now pleaded, with an indescribable air of timidity and subservience. "I really don't think you are as soft as I said, now that you show up here again so quickly."

She had halted half way down the stairs, and there stood holding her wrapper about her, as if undecided whether to obey him or not.

But Keene felt that he had her dead to rights, and the demure cleverness of the girl was pleasing him, and he was not inclined to be needlessly severe.

"I don't intend to be hard on you," he replied, "but you must go with me."

"I suppose the game is up, isn't it?"

"Very much up, young lady."

"Am I under arrest?"

"Nothing less."

Miss Harvey began to cry.

"Come, come," said Keene; "I have no time to waste. You may do your crying on the way, but you must go along with me."

"I—I suppose I may dress my—myself first, mayn't I?" she sobbed, as if scarce able to enunciate the very natural request.

"Yes, you may dress yourself," said Keene, curtly.

"Here, woman!" he added, sharply. "Go up to that girl's room with her, and remain there while she is dressing. Don't lose sight of her for a moment, and if she attempts any dodge, call to me at once."

"What—what d-d-dodge can I now attempt," sobbed Miss Harvey, in copious tears behind her handkerchief.

"Suicide, like enough!" exclaimed Keene, bluntly. "Get up there, both of you, and don't keep me waiting longer than necessary."

"Really, sir," began Mrs. Cabot.

"Don't wait to argue with me," Keene sharply interrupted. "Do what I command. And see that you don't lose sight of the girl, or worse luck will be yours."

Though in some perturbation, and evidently more or less alarmed, Mrs. Cabot now proceeded to follow the detective's instructions. She started up the stairs, Miss Harvey leading the way, and Keene presently heard the chamber door close behind them.

Then he sat down on the stairs and waited.

When compared with his disappointment on the train, the present situation was eminently satisfactory.

That Miss Harvey, clever though as she might be, could now escape him, appeared utterly absurd.

For about ten minutes the detective patiently waited.

He knew by the experience the length of time it requires a lady of style to dress.

At the end of ten minutes he heard a chamber door open, and then a young man in a checked suit called down over the baluster rail:

"Miss Harvey says you may come up to her room, sir," he said, in tones which indicated an affection for the girl, and none for the detective.

"Tell her to come down here," Keene sharply answered, rising to his feet.

"She cannot close her portmanteau."

"Why don't you close it for her?"

"I am not working this week—at least not for you and against her."

And with that the young man turned and, opening a doorway, disappeared within.

If he supposed for one instant that his new makeup had deceived Detective Keene, he was woefully mistaken. Sheridan Keene had recognized this dandified young man at once as none other than Nell Harvey.

But that brief glance also told Keene that the young man was a man in reality and not a woman in disguise.

With every detective instinct in him aroused, he dashed up the stairs. The entrance to Nell Harvey's room was at the other end of the hall, and as he reached it he strode into the room.

At that instant the door was shut behind

him violently. The young man had concealed himself in a closet directly opposite, and, rushing out as Keene entered the room, he dashed by, giving the door a swing as he passed it, and flew down stairs at the top of his speed.

Quick as a flash, he tore open the front door. Keene was at the head of the stairs now. The detective sprang down in two bounds, but the door was shut in his face.

The young man leaped over the gate at a single bound, sprang into the deserted vehicle, and was away before Keene could reach him. He had not a second to spare, as Keene was within twenty feet of him when the horse dashed out of reach.

There was no use shooting at him, as the back of the buggy hid him from view.

The young man in the checked suit looked back and saw him. Then he leaned out from the swaying buggy, cheerfully waving his hand to the enraged detective, and shouted loudly :

"Ta, ta, my dear Mr. Keene! You must rise earlier in the morning if you really mean to turn down Johnny Guile!"

Then the departing team was lost in a cloud of dust a hundred yards down the road.

Keene turned briefly back into the house, and returned to the chamber he had entered a few moments before.

Scattered about upon the bed and chairs in disordered array, lay all of Nellie Harvey's discarded garments, and upon the chiffoniere her splendid auburn wig.

Upon the floor behind the bed was stretched the helpless figure of affrighted Mrs. Cabot, tied hand and foot, and with the casing from one of the pillows bound securely over her mouth.

CHAPTER VI.

KEENE SCORES A POINT.

Despite his haste and discomfiture, Sheridan Keene would not depart in pursuit of Johnny Guile until he had released Mrs. Cabot. This required only a few moments, and her story was quickly told.

The moment she had entered the chamber with the notorious young swindler, he had unceremoniously thrust a revolver under

her nose, and threatened her life then and there unless she remained perfectly quiet and obeyed him. As a matter of fact she had been too terrified to do otherwise, and had quietly submitted to being bound and gagged, in which condition the detective had discovered her.

"Have you at any time suspected your boarder to be a man, Mrs. Cabot?" Keene sternly demanded, when she had finished.

The poor woman protested her entire ignorance of anything pertaining to Johnny Guile, and as there then was nothing to be gained by remaining, Keene called his companion from the back yard and they departed together.

"We shall find your team somewhere below here," he assured the young man, who appeared rather disturbed over the theft and the unexpected turn of affairs.

"I hope so, sir, I am sure," he said, half-doubtfully.

"There is no doubt about it," Keene replied. "The shrewd scamp will not chance driving very far, lest an alarm is telephoned in all directions. It is easier to catch a man with a team in these days than a man without one. I feel less riled over my infernal blunder, since I have discovered the criminal to be Johnny Guile. He is known all over the country for his exceeding cleverness, and if I for a moment had dreamed that he was the chap in that auburn wig, he'd have had bracelets on long ago."

"Do you think you now will be able to run him down?"

"I don't think at all about it; I know!" was the reply, with grim austerity. "I will run him down for this little caper, my man, or I'll throw up my commission at the end of the year."

"Have you any idea in what direction he will head?"

"Not the slightest," growled Keene, "but I have an idea where I can lay my hands on one of his confederates, and I'll make it a point to have him in bracelets before the sun sets."

"If you can do that, and force him to turn State's evidence, sir, it might be turned to account."

"We shall see," Keene simply rejoined, yet in a way that spoke louder than words.

He proved to be right about the stolen team. At the end of a half-hour they located it in one of the side streets, left deserted at the curbing.

Inquiries in the immediate neighborhood resulted in nothing of importance, however; for no person could be found who had seen Johnny Guile leave the team, nor who was able to state in what direction he had gone.

Sheridan Keene delayed in M— only long enough to remunerate the young man for the use of his time and team, and then hastened to the railway station and boarded the first train into Boston.

Without waiting even to visit the headquarters in Pemberton Square, he consulted a train schedule in the Union station, and having snatched a hasty lunch he took the one o'clock train to Salem.

It was in this city that he had heard Johnny Guile instruct his confederate to await a letter, and the mission of the detective may be easily conjectured.

It was about two o'clock when he entered the Salem post-office, and he made his entrance by a side door which led to the interior of the department.

"I wish to see the postmaster at once," he explained to one of the clerks, who showed an inclination to stop him.

The detective's authoritative manner was not without effect, however, and the clerk led him to the door of a small room off the mailing department.

"There is a gentleman here to see you, sir," he said to the postmaster.

The latter, who was seated at a desk, looked up inquiringly at the detective.

Keene immediately displayed his badge and stated his mission, when he was at once more cordially received.

"I had a warning card only this morning, relative to the books stolen from the M— office," the postmaster now said, genially. "It is a very serious theft. In what way can I be of service to you?"

"The real thief was one Johnny Guile," replied Keene, who had not imparted his recent humiliating experience. "I am unable to locate him just at present, but I am

very sure that one of his confederates is here in Salem, and that he will call at this office for a letter, if he has not already done so and received it."

"What is the man's name, Detective Keene? We easily can see if there is a letter here addressed to him."

"I am working under many difficulties, sir," replied Keene, with a significant shrug of his broad shoulders. "I do not know the man's name."

"That is unfortunate."

"Yes, decidedly so."

"Can you describe him?"

"Yes, quite accurately."

"Well, that may help."

"He is a young man, I should say about thirty-five years old, of medium height—"

"Wait one moment, inspector!" interposed the postmaster, abruptly rising. "Let's go out and see the general delivery clerk. You can describe the man to him, also; and if the party you suspect has already been here, my clerk may recall him from your description, and will, perhaps, remember the fellow's name."

"A good idea!" exclaimed Keene.

And they crossed the mailing department together, and joined the young man clerk at the general delivery window.

In a few words the postmaster introduced the detective, and explained the latter's business there.

"Now tax your memory, Harry," he added, to the clerk; "and see if you can recall any applicant for a letter to-day who would answer the description which Detective Keene will give you."

"I'll do my best, sir," replied the clerk.

He stepped a little aside from the window, which was closed in on both sides by the general delivery boxes, which hid the three men from view of any person in the public office outside.

"Angels can only do their best," smiled Keene, in response to the clerk's words.

"What style of man have you in mind, sir?"

"A very ordinary type," laughed Keene. "He is about thirty-five years old, of medium height, but quite solidly set up. His features are distinctly Irish, with a stubby nose, gray

eyes, and a large mouth. When I last saw him, which was in the early part of last evening, he wore a brown plaid coat and vest, a pair of striped trousers, a brown derby hat and a——"

"Good God!" suddenly exclaimed the postmaster, scarce above his breath. "Isn't this the very man, Detective Keene?"

He had caught sight of Malloy, indeed, who at that moment was entering the public office to ask for the letter he was expecting to receive from Johnny Guile.

He came so quickly to the window that Keene had no opportunity for concealing himself, and as the detective swung round to look at the man, whom he quickly recognized, Malloy's eyes fell also upon Sheridan Keene.

Instantly the scamp recognized in him the man he had observed following Johnny Guile in M—— the previous afternoon, when the latter warned him to get out of sight. His features changed like a flash, and at once betrayed his impulse to turn about and run.

He drew back a step or two, hesitating for the fraction of a second—and then Sheridan Keene, with a single bound, had reached the counter.

Snatching out his revolver he leaned through the delivery window, thrusting his weapon almost into Malloy's startled face, and cried with terrible sternness:

"Stand where you are, sir! If you move a hair, I'll drop you dead!"

Some of his earlier disappointment sounded in the detective's threatening voice, yet Malloy had the nerve to grasp a rather desperate opportunity which the situation afforded.

A young, well-dressed lady was just closing one of the lock boxes less than two feet from where the criminal was standing.

These two persons were the only ones in the outer office.

With a movement as quick as that of a cat, Malloy sprang behind the lady and seized her roughly by both arms. Using her as a shield for himself, while piercing cries of fright rose from the startled woman's lips, the ruffian forced her violently toward the street door.

"Stop!" shouted Keene, from the window. "Stop!, or I'll fire!"

"Go ahead and fire," yelled Malloy, crouching behind the helpless woman and dragging her after him.

In another moment he had gained the threshold of the street door, while Keene was absolutely prevented from taking the desperate chance of a shot at him. Then giving the half-fainting woman a shove in the direction of the detective, the daring scoundrel sprang through the office door and dashed up the street.

But the postmaster and his clerk, who before this had taken in the requirements of the startling situation, were close upon Malloy's heels.

Sheridan Keene dashed through the mailing department and out by the street door. It seemed to him, as he ran, that this day was for him a red-letter day of mishaps and disappointments.

When he reached the front street, however, his feelings underwent an agreeable change. Upon the sidewalk fifty yards away, three men were lying almost prostrate in a struggle which gave new color to the probable culmination of the affair. Rushing to the spot, Keene also took a hand, and in far less time than is required to write it, Terry Malloy was standing pale, panting and humiliated on the sidewalk, with a pair of handcuffs securely on his wrists.

Fortunately the episode had been of only brief duration, and was witnessed only by a few persons; and Sheridan Keene, who subsequently found it very desirable to keep the fact of the arrest from the knowledge of Johnny Guile, had no difficulty in suppressing the news and preventing its publication by the local press.

Rather the worse in appearance for his rough handling, Terry Malloy was ignominiously conducted back to the Salem post-office, and seated in a chair in the postmaster's private room.

"Now, my man, the sooner you make a clean breast of it the better it will be for you," Keene sternly said, when they had the rascal well under cover, and the door closed against chance observers. "What is your name?"

"If you don't find out till I tell you, sure it will be many a day," replied Malloy, with dogged surliness.

"Just as you like about it," returned Keene, with a display of grim indifference. "But make sure of one fact, my man, the more trouble you cause, the longer time you'll do for it."

"I can only get the limit for a crime, whatever it is you think you've got me for."

"We don't think anything about it," my man. We know what we have you for."

"Then you know more'n I do."

"Is that so. Perhaps you've forgotten meeting Johnny Guile in M—— yesterday, and of going to his room in the evening. You didn't hear Johnny Guile threaten to do Sheridan Keene up for good and all, before he should corner your paper gold mine, did you? You crooks are very bold and clever till you find yourselves with bracelets on and in a corner, and then your memory forsakes you. But I'll find a way to bring it back into your thick head, my man. Just look over your general delivery letters out there, Harry, and see if you can find any post marked from M——. If you find one, bring it to me."

The voice and manner now assumed by Sheridan Keene were those which speedily bring most of these baffled malefactors to abject terms. About the best and boldest of them will knuckle when a prison cell stares them in the face, and will resort even to treachery and betrayal of their confederates, in the hope of escaping a sentence.

And Terry Malloy, who was far from being the best and boldest, now underwent a change.

"See here, inspector," he cried, starting up in his chair. "D'ye mean to tell me Johnny Guile has been taken?"

"I am not telling you anything, my man. It is you who must tell me," said Keene, sternly. "If you are ready to open your mouth, do so. If not, you may keep it closed."

"You won't say whether Johnny Guile's been taken?" demanded Malloy, with an angry scowl.

"No, sir."

"Then hang me if I'll open my mouth till you do!"

"It's your privilege to keep it closed."

"Here is a letter postmarked from M—— this morning, sir," said the office clerk, now hurriedly returning.

"Let me see it."

"It is addressed to——"

"Stop!" interrupted Keene, taking the letter and glancing at the superscription. "Yes, this is the one, my boy. As a matter of fact, I am becoming quite familiar with the flowing chirography of clever Johnny Guile. Now what do you say, my man? Will you speak out, or not?"

"Devil a word will you get out of me!"

"All right, Mr. Terrance Malloy," returned Keene, reading with grim satisfaction the address upon the letter in his hand. "We'll see what Johnny Guile has written you from M——."

And without a moment's hesitation, Keene broke the seal and read the contents of the sheet enclosed.

It read as follows:

"DEAR TERRY:

"That infernal Keene has made it too warm to remain here in the post-office, and I shall shake my skirts to-day and join Bill. You lay low in Salem until Friday, and then come and meet us. We shall try working a few of the money orders in local places, until we have made a sufficient raise to vamoose, when we had better start West."

"Bill will meet you at Riley's Friday noon. I shall keep under cover, or work the Reuben, for Keene is making it too warm for me to run about in the open. Don't keep Bill waiting. Friday noon, sure!"

"JOHNNY."

Keene folded the letter and thrust it into his pocket.

Again his manner brought a fit of weakness over the man opposite.

"See here, inspector," he cried, leaning forward in his chair, with the manacles jingling between his knees; "what do I get if I squeal?"

"I shall make no terms with you, Malloy," replied Keene. "I already have the game well in hand."

"Don't I get anything for splitting?" cried Malloy, desperately.

"I'll report the fact when you are brought before the court," Keene answered, shortly. "That is the best bid I'll make you."

"What do you want to know?"

"Where is Riley's?" demanded Keene, now satisfied that the fellow was weakening.

"What Riley's?"

"Where you might go to meet Bill? Don't beat the bush with me, Malloy, if you mean business."

"It's a gin mill in Lynn," replied Malloy, glaring at Keene with grim and sullen eyes.

"What street?"

"Market street."

"And who is Bill?"

"His name is Bill Baker."

"Don't he live in Lynn?"

"No; he comes from Pittsburg."

"Do you know where he lodges in Lynn?" Malloy shook his head.

"I've not been in Lynn at all yet," he replied. "I'd not know where to look for him."

"How did you know about Riley's, if you have never been in Lynn?"

"I have the address in my vest."

"Has Baker got the stolen money-order books?"

"He had them the last I knew."

"How many are there in your gang?"

"Only three, me and Johnny and Baker."

The fellow's responses convinced Keene that he was telling very nearly the truth, and he had learned all that he then required.

"That's all for the present, Malloy," he said, bluntly. "Now pull yourself together, and we will take a ride into town."

Keene delayed his departure only to arrange with the postmaster to insure the suppression of the news of Malloy's arrest, then took his man into Boston.

He proved to be as good as his word given his acquaintance of the early morning. Before sunset, Johnny Guile's confederate was lodged in the Tombs.

CHAPTER VII.

KEENE SCORES A POINT.

"Two many cooks may spoil the broth," said Chief Watts that evening, after Terence Malloy had been safely lodged in jail.

"Why so, chief?" inquired Keene, who had

but recently returned from the Tombs, and had just made an official report of his day's work.

"Because if those two rascals are in Lynn, and likely to remain there until Friday, of which there seems no reasonable doubt, it will not do to start the whole police force of Lynn in search of them, like a pack of hounds after a pair of rabbits."

"The larger the pack the louder the bark," said Keene, seeing at once what Chief Watts was driving at.

"That is true," nodded the latter.

"And Johnny Guile, from what I have seen of him, appears to be too clever by far to be easily caught napping," laughed Keene, with a rather significant grimace.

"True again. It is safe enough that he will constantly have an eye upon the doings of the local police, and immediate activity on their part will at once alarm him, and possibly drive him to seeking cover elsewhere."

"That means, good-by, Johnny; and good-by, money orders; for a time at least."

"It must be prevented," rejoined Chief Watts, decisively; "and both of these scamps must be taken into camp with this opportunity. It is too good a one to be lost."

"I think so, chief."

"But you had better attempt it on the quiet," continued Chief Watts. "Instead of getting help from the Lynn officers, some of whom may be personally known to Guile or his confederate, you had better take from here what officers you'll require."

"I shall not need more than two, I think."

"Take Raymond and Merton. They both are good men for this kind of a job."

"Are they about here?"

"You can easily locate them. I think Merton came in a few minutes ago."

"Have you any instructions?"

"I think not," replied Chief Watts, turning to his desk. "The case is hardly one requiring further instructions. I leave to you the method by which these fellows best can be secured, which naturally will depend upon incidental circumstances. You had better take your officers with you, and go down to Lynn to-night."

"Very well, sir," bowed Keene, rising to go.

It was Wednesday when Terry Malloy was arrested and lodged in jail, and although Keene and his two companions kept a close watch in Lynn during all of Thursday, not a trace of Johnny Guile nor of a man answering Baker's description, could be found.

Keene had adopted a disguise to prevent being recognized by Guile, should he be observed upon the street; but both of his assistants took it for granted that they were not personally known.

On Friday morning Keene made a call upon the Lynn postmaster, and learned that no less than three of the local merchants had the previous day been victimized by the fraudulent money orders, and that two cases had been reported from Maplewood and Saugus.

These facts indicated beyond reasonable doubt that the arrest of Malloy was not suspected by Johnny Guile, and that the latter was assiduously plying his infamous vocation, probably in an effort to raise funds by which he and his confederate could escape to another part of the country.

"Have you seen any of the parties upon whom these money orders were imposed?" Keene inquired of the Lynn postmaster.

"Only Mr. May, the stove man," was the reply. "I was not here when the others called."

"Did Mr. May give you any description of the swindler?"

"He described him as being a plainly-dressed man, apparently about forty years old, and who claimed to be a farmer from Hampton."

Keene smiled significantly.

"That was Johnny Guile fast enough."

"You think he is working this job in disguise?"

"There is no doubt about it, sir," replied Keene. "He knows well enough that a description of him is out, and he will take no chance of appearing on the street in his true character. It is very evident that he is short of ready money, and has been working this venture solely for the purpose of getting funds with which to depart."

"It would appear so, certainly."

"I think we shall have him in custody before night, however," rejoined Keene, as he

turned to go. "If any stranger presents one of the orders at your window, have him arrested at once upon suspicion, and hold him until he can be fully identified."

"I'll do that, surely."

"There is a bare chance," added Keene, "that they will attempt to work even the post-office."

"I'll be ready for them if they do."

It then was about ten o'clock in the morning, and noon was the hour appointed by Johnny Guile to meet Malloy and Bill Baker.

Leaving the post-office, Keene immediately returned to his hotel and rejoined his two companions.

"The scamps have been at work under our very eyes!" he exclaimed, on entering their room.

"You don't mean it."

"Nothing else. Half a dozen orders already have been turned into cash, and we must work sharp to make an arrest before the scoundrels can leave. If we fail at Riley's we are done up for a time, surely."

"What plan have you in mind?"

"One which I think may be successfully worked," Keene rejoined. "I shall attempt to make Baker my dupe, and through him locate Johnny Guile."

"In what way?"

"By getting Baker to take me to their lodgings. I shall probably require help to land both of them, and shall expect both of you to be near enough to aid me, if it comes to a tough scrap."

"We'll be on hand, Keene; you may rest easy on that score."

"Keep in the background, however, until you get some sign from me," cautioned the detective. "If you see me leave Riley's in company with a man, follow us and be guided by circumstances. You'll know that I, at least, have made a favorable impression upon him, and probably am starting for a meeting with Johnny Guile."

While further describing his plan of operation, Sheridan Keene made a careful change in his personal appearance.

At the end of a half-hour he had made himself up as a common, tough-looking type of young man, clad in cheap, threadbare clothes,

and with a countenance presenting all the signs of recent dissipation.

These preparations having been made, he slipped a revolver into each of his hip pockets, and was ready for the work.

At about half-past eleven he entered Riley's saloon on Market street, and approached the bar, purchasing a glass of beer, which he took to one of the side tables, together with a sandwich. The latter he ate, but the beer he disposed of in a cuspidor, wishing to have a perfectly clear head for the work he instinctively felt was before him.

The saloon was a commodious one and well patronized, and the fact that he remained hanging about the place occasioned no notice.

The clock on the wall indicated the hour of twelve before any man answering Baker's description, as it had been recently given by Malloy, put in an appearance.

At precisely twelve, however, a solidly-built man of nearly fifty, with dark eyes and a heavy black mustache, entered the saloon. He was ordinarily dressed and appeared like a business man.

The moment Keene saw him, he recognized him as the party treacherously described by Malloy.

"Now, then, the work begins," he said to himself.

He glanced toward the open door leading to the street.

Inspector Merton was standing on the curb of the sidewalk, with his back toward the saloon door, and his hands thrust into his pockets.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WARM CHASE.

There was nothing in the conduct of Baker, when he entered Riley's saloon that would have rendered him liable to suspicion.

He merely flashed a casual glance over the several men gathered at the bar, and, with scarce any notice whatever of Sheridan Keene, he at once took a chair at one of the side tables and ordered a drink.

Keene waited fully five minutes before Baker began to show signs of impatience at

not seeing the man he expected. Then the detective left his chair, and, securing another sandwich from the bar, turned to take a seat at the table back of Baker, and in the chair nearest him.

Baker did not give him the slightest notice, however, until Keene, turning slightly in his chair, abruptly addressed him.

"Easy, pal!" he said, softly, half over his shoulder. "Don't give yourself away! I have a word for your ear!"

Though startled by the occurrence, its significance was instantly appreciated; and scarce a muscle of Baker's dark countenance changed. He turned a little in his chair, however, and glanced at the grim face of the party who had addressed him; then demanded, doubtfully, under his huge mustache:

"Are you talking to me?"

"That's what, sir?"

"I guess you've made a mistake, young fellow," said Baker, not fancying the appearance of the stranger.

"It's not mine, then; but another man's."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I was run in for being drunk last night down in Salem," Keene softly rejoined; "and the fellow in the next cell to mine put me up to this."

"In the next cell to yours."

"That's why I came up here this morning," nodded Keene, with an air of grim earnestness. "He said his name was Malloy, and he asked me what I was in for. When I told him it was only a case of drunk, he slipped me the stuff for to pay my fine with, in case I'd do him a turn for the service."

"What kind of a yarn are you springing on me?" demanded Baker, now turning about in his chair and facing the detective. "Do I look like a man who would have any interest in such a story?"

Keene artfully hesitated for a moment, as if this repulse had led him to fear that he might have mistaken his man.

"Mebbe I'm wrong," he growled, shortly. "But I'd swear you was the party he wanted me to look for."

"What did he tell you?" inquired Baker, whose secret interest was fully as great as can be imagined.

"He told me he'd been arrested, though he didn't say for what," replied Keene, looking doubtfully up at his hearer from under his knitted brows. "But he said he was going to meet a man here to-day, and he wanted me to come up here and let him know what had happened to him."

"Did he say when he was arrested?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"He was pulled in the Salem post-office Tuesday afternoon."

"At what time?"

"Somewhere around three o'clock, he said," replied Keene. "He told me he went there to get a letter, and that some Boston detective nailed him at the window where they give them out. He didn't tell me what he was pulled in for."

"What else did he tell you?"

"Nothing else at all," growled Keene. "He wanted me to be here just at noon to-day, and if a man, such as he described, came in here, I was to tell him just what I've told you. That was all he wanted, he said."

"Did he tell you the name of the man he wanted you to meet?"

Keene grimly shook his head.

"No, he didn't give me any names."

"What is your name?" demanded Baker.

"Joe Black."

"Do you live in Lynn?"

"No, I live in Salem. I work in the dye house, when I work at all."

"Will you have a drink?"

"I don't mind."

Mr. Baker gave the order to one of the waiters, and now the detective was obliged to swallow the beverage provided him.

It was very evident, now, that Baker was in more or less of a quandry. The artful story he had heard was too plausible to be seriously doubted, yet the situation was so hazardous that he wished his cleverer confederate, Johnny Guile, was there to hear it also.

For fully five minutes Baker weighed the matter in his mind, and then turned again to the disguised officer.

"Could you keep your mouth closed, if there was anything in doing so?" he demanded, significantly.

Keene allowed his grim countenance to

light up with an expression of avaricious anticipation, and the change was very favorably observed by his questioner.

"Ay, I can keep it closed," he quickly rejoined.

"Perhaps you might not be so willing, if you thought there was any danger in doing it."

"I'd not think much about any danger, pal, if there was anything in it for me," returned Keene, in a way that left no doubt of his meaning.

"Where are you going for the next hour?"

"No place at all."

"I'd like to have you tell this yarn to a friend of mine," said Baker, steadily regarding him.

"I can wait here till you bring him," Keene craftily replied.

"He cannot come here very well," Baker rejoined. "He is a little under the weather, and confined to his room."

"How far off is it?"

"Five minutes walk or so."

Keene went down into his pocket and fished out a soiled time-table of the railway, and gave it a brief examination.

"I'd like to get the train back to Salem at two," he growled, doubtfully. "I suppose I could wait over, though, if there was anything in it. If there's not, I reckon I've done the square by the fellow I saw in jail; and that's all I'm here for."

This last settled the doubts in the mind of Mr. Baker, and he now said, in a more friendly way:

"It will not take long to go up to my friend's room, and we will make it worth your while. What do you say? Will you go?"

"If it ain't any further than you say, I will."

"We can reach there in five minutes," said Baker, rising. "It's barely possible we may wish to send some word to Salem by you, and if we do you shall lose nothing by serving us. Come out this way."

Keene awkwardly arose and swaggered out from between the tables, while Baker paused at the bar to pay his bill and purchase two cigars.

"Will you smoke?" he asked, rejoining his new acquaintance.

Keene merely nodded, and standing unsteadily in the floor he delayed long enough to light the cigar.

At the same time he made sure that Inspector Merton still was on the curbing outside.

"Come this way!" growled Baker, when they reached the sidewalk.

As docile as a lamb being led to the slaughter, Keene turned in the direction indicated, and walked away at the swindler's side.

Merton fell in behind them in an indifferent way, and followed.

Raymond had issued from a doorway and was a dozen feet in advance of them.

That Baker now was doing the very thing for which Keene had planned, and was taking him to the lodgings occupied by Johnny Guile, the detective had not a doubt.

Before they had gone two blocks, however, Keene's alert eyes had lighted upon a person standing partly around the corner of a building nearly opposite, and gazing with a pronounced interest in their direction.

This person was none other than Johnny Guile, made up as a countryman, and who evidently was either out upon business, or else had been so anxious concerning the arranged meeting that he had ventured into the neighborhood to witness it for himself.

He had not yet been observed by Baker; but the moment Keene's eyes fell upon him, the detective decided what to do.

The difficulty of arresting both men in a house, providing he now could get them there, was a problem not easily solved; and Keene immediately adopted what then seemed the safer and surer method.

"Wait a bit till I tie my shoe!" he suddenly exclaimed, stooping to the sidewalk and bringing Baker to a halt.

The action also compelled Inspector Merton, who was a dozen yards behind, to approach them as any ordinary and disinterested pedestrian would have done.

The moment he was sufficiently near, however, Keene arose quickly to his feet. Wheeling sharply about, he dealt Baker a blow that sent him reeling squarely into the arms

of the approaching detective, at the same time crying forcibly:

"Secure that man, Merton! I see the other! Come back here, Raymond, and lend Merton a hand!"

Seeing that Raymond had heard him, Keene waited no longer. Leaving the three men in a furious struggle upon the sidewalk, for Baker did not easily succumb, Keene started straight for the countryman on the corner fifty yards away.

Johnny Guile had witnessed the incident, and the moment Keene began to approach him the swindler guessed the truth.

"By Heaven, it's Sheridan Keene!" he gasped.

Then he dropped the carpetbag he was carrying, and ran at the top of his speed down the side street.

The detective still was fifty yards behind him, and the pursuit promised to be a warm one. Yet neither of them dreamed to what an end it would come.

Johnny Guile headed in the direction of his lodgings. The stolen money-order books were then in his room. He figured that, if he could reach the house well in advance of the detective, he could secure the books and effect his escape by the rear door, in this way throwing Keene off his track.

It was nip and tuck between them for a hundred yards, and then Johnny Guile turned the corner of the street in which he and Baker had been lodging.

The house was one of a long, inferior brick block.

Making strenuous efforts to arrive at the house and get under cover before Keene could reach the corner and observe into which door he had entered, Johnny Guile ran as men run only when life or liberty is in the balance.

He reached the door, darted up the stone steps, and let himself into the house with a latch key, locking the door after him.

Then he dashed up-stairs to his room, tossed the money-order books into a small satchel, tore off his facial disguise, and started down the stairs.

As he reached the entry on the street floor, the window of the front door was beaten in with a crash, and the arm and hand of Sheri-

dan Keene were thrust through in an effort to unlock the door.

While doing this the detective caught sight of Johnny Guile in the entry.

The latter did not wait, however. He went down the back stairs at breakneck speed, and out by the rear door.

As he went out by the back, Keene entered by the front, and started through the hall.

There a woman, who had been brought into the entry by the crash of the breaking glass, interfered. With more courage than discretion, she fell upon Keene before he could pass her, screaming at the top of her lungs, and assailing him tooth and nail:

With his blood now at fever heat, Keene did not delay to explain the situation and offer excuses. He raised the woman bodily, breaking her excited hold upon his garments, and threw her roughly to the floor.

"I'll explain later!" he cried, angrily, as he rushed down the rear stairs by which he had seen Johnny Guile depart.

As he neared the basement door, the furious barking of a dog in the back yard momentarily startled him. He did not pause for a moment, but he felt instinctively for his revolver.

There was no occasion to use the weapon, however. The dog was tied to a post in one corner of the yard, and well away from the back gate.

It struck Keene as being a good omen.

As he entered the long alley back of the row of houses, Johnny Guile was just leaving it by the farther end.

Determined to overtake and arrest him, if the power to do so was in him, Keene increased his speed. Dashing through the alley and over the ash barrels which the swindler had thrown down as he ran, the detective again reached the street on which the block of houses fronted.

Johnny Guile was turning a corner forty yards away, and running in the direction of the railway station.

Keene now observed that he carried a satchel, and he felt sure that the stolen money-order books were in it. Though panting hard for breath, and with his heart thumping like a trip-hammer, Keene still maintained the pursuit.

Twice he lost sight of Johnny Guile, and once he feared that the scoundrel again had fooled him; but a moment later the scamp showed up between two houses on the opposite side of the street, making through the yards to the adjoining avenue.

Keene crossed the lots also, and reached the avenue fifty yards behind him.

"By Heaven, I've not gained an inch on him!" he involuntarily muttered. "He certainly is giving me the toughest battle I ever experienced."

Five minutes later Johnny Guile had reached Market street, and was within a hundred yards of the central railway station.

The first thing that caught his eye as he approached was a train headed for Boston.

It was the Portland express, making its last stop on the run in.

It offered Johnny Guile a splendid excuse for rushing through the middle of the street at the top of his speed. Everybody who saw him, and nearly everybody did, supposed he was running to catch the train.

And so he was.

While he still was thirty yards away, the train started. It filled the scoundrel with delight. He was nearly winded, and it would have been but a question of minutes before Sheridan Keene would have had him run down.

Here, however, was an unexpected means of escape.

By a last strenuous effort, and amid the cheers of a crowd of observers, Johnny Guile ducked under a descending gate, reached the moving train, caught the rear step of the smoking-car, and clambered aboard. As he did so, the gate struck the ground, completely blocking the way.

Keene was then fifty yards away, and very few people on the sidewalks had observed him, their interest having been taken up by the other.

He came down the street as a racer approaching the wire.

The last car of the train, constantly moving faster, had already left the station.

The gateman at the crossing saw Keene coming, and, suspecting his design, rushed out from his box into the street and attempted to stop him.

Keene could not have spoken a loud word for life itself, for his breath was next to gone. But the muscular energy of the man was almost exhaustless.

He knew that many of the gatemen's huts were built right in the fence, so that the gatemen could reach the railroad yards without going through the gateway.

Quick as a flash he detected this, even while he was racing for the gate. But Johnny Guile, seeing the gate touch the ground, turned into the smoking-car with a grim smile of satisfaction.

Keene was upon the gateman now. He swept him out of his path with a single blow, ducked into his hut, slipped through to the other side, and, at the risk of his neck, caught the rear platform of the last car.

He and Johnny Guile were both upon the train—but Johnny Guile was at a disadvantage.

He did not imagine, even, that Keene was there.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DESPERATION OF JOHNNY GUILE.

Sheridan Kneene made his way into the rear car, and dropped into the nearest seat to regain his breath and steady his nerves.

It was nearly a twenty-minute run to Boston, and he knew that Johnny Guile could not leave the train until it arrived in the city.

At the end of five minutes the conductor came through, and Keene paid his fare.

"Did you happen to see the young man who caught the train just as it was leaving?" he asked, as he received his change.

"Yes, I did," nodded the conductor, laughing.

"A close call, wasn't it?"

"Very. The fellow evidently was nearly winded, but he made a creditable finish."

"He is still on the train, of course?"

"Yes; he cannot leave it until we reach Boston."

"Do you know which car he is in?"

"He is in the smoker, I think," replied the conductor, looking at Keene, as if he wondered at such a fusillade of questions from such a fellow as he appeared to be.

The detective asked him no more, but settled back in his seat.

He waited until thoroughly rested from his recent strain, then arose and started through the train.

There was an expression of grim determination on his dark features. It was with a feeling of genuine satisfaction that he went forward to make the arrest of notorious Johnny Guile. The chase the fellow had led him, the humiliations to which he had subjected him, the cleverness with which he had repeatedly fooled him—all combined to make the arrest an unusually agreeable one.

The train, speeding over the rails at nearly fifty miles an hour, had left Revere and was sweeping over a long stretch of surrounding marshes.

Keene moved leisurely through the cars, three of which were the ordinary day coaches, and approached the smoking-car.

As he left the rear platform and opened the car door, he sent a swift glance over the numerous passengers, in the hope of locating his man. He was unable to see him, however, and started through the aisle in search of him. He had taken only a few steps, when, without a word, but with a look on his face that would beggar description, Johnny Guile sprang out into the aisle at the other end of the car.

He had been facing the rear of the train, and now saw the detective approaching.

He gave one glance toward the door, as if his impulse was to attempt to escape by leaping from the train; but that one glance at the rushing roadbed outside told him that death alone would be the reward of such daring.

Then he swung round and faced Keene again, who now was rapidly approaching.

All that was desperate in the criminal, and all that vengeful in his nature leaped into play in the face of the hopeless situation, and he recalled the threat he had made in his taunting letter to Sheridan Keene.

Without a word, but with countenance ghastly white and threatening, he snatched his revolver out of his pocket.

"Put up that gun!" commanded Keene, without halting.

For a reply, Johnny Guile fired point blank at the detective's head.

Keene anticipated the movement and sprang aside. The bullet was buried in the woodwork in the farther end of the car.

The report of the weapon rang intensely upon the closed atmosphere and turned the place into an uproar. Men sprang up on all sides, then, realizing the fearful situation, for Sheridan Keene now had drawn his own weapon. They ducked in all directions and scrambled wildly for shelter beneath the seats.

"Drop that gun, Johnny, or I'll shoot!" again thundered Keene, watching his every movement, yet feeling averse to firing upon him if it could be avoided.

"I'll not drop it until I have dropped you!"

He fired again while he spoke, and the bullet grazed Keene's shoulder.

Then the report of the detective's weapon rang through the car.

The ball smashed the window back of Johnny Guile, and the swindler immediately returned the shot.

It went wide of the mark and shattered one of the lamps above the detective's head. Amid the crash of falling glass, the cries of excited men, and the yells of those affrighted, Keene gave utterance to an angry oath and dashed up the aisle, determined to end the engagement at the cost of his life.

Through the smoke now filling the car, Johnny Guile saw him coming, and, turning sharply about, he opened the door and sprang out upon the platform. Before Keene could reach him, the swindler had darted into the baggage-car and taken refuge at the farther end, behind a trunk.

As Keene entered the car after him, a bullet whistled by his head and was buried in the wall of the car behind. Dropping to his knee, Keene fired at the swindler's leg, the only part of him then visible from behind his refuge.

A cry of mingled rage and pain followed the shot, and Johnny Guile, with the bones of his left foot shattered by the ball, rose above the trunk, by which he was yet able to steady himself, and returned the shot.

The bullet entered Keene's left arm and

loosed that tiger part of him which would stop at nothing. Drawing his other revolver, he fired shot after shot at his opponent, at the same time rushing through the car in his direction.

Only one shot answered this fusillade, for Johnny Guile had emptied his only weapon; and as Keene sprang nearer, the desperate scoundrel, more vicious and vengeful than any Sheridan Keene had yet encountered, hurled the empty weapon straight at the detective's head.

Keene dodged in time to escape it, however, and in another moment he had Johnny Guile prostrate upon the floor, pinned down by the throat.

It had been a bitter and exciting conflict, brief though it was; but that ended it. Thrusting his weapon back into his pocket, Keene quickly fastened a pair of handcuffs about the wrists of the prostrate man.

"Well, Mr. Johnny, what do you say now?" he cried, as he rose to his feet. "Am I as soft as you imagined?"

Though groaning from the painful wound in his foot, and with the blood flowing from a graze along one side of his brow, Johnny Guile raised himself to his elbow, and answered, with a bitterness pen could not depict:

"If you had been half as soft as I believed, you'd not be alive now to taunt me with that question!"

"I guess that is too true for a joke," rejoined Keene, grimly. "Is there a doctor or surgeon here?"

The latter was addressed to a crowd of men, which already was filling the car, now that the danger was over.

"I am a surgeon," cried one, coming quickly forward. "Are you wounded?"

"Yes," replied Keene, holding up his hand, from which the blood was dripping.

"I'll fix you, sir!"

"Oh, never mind me!" returned the detective. "It's only a flesh wound, and I can wait. Look after that fellow first of all, doctor. And be sure you put him in good enough shape to stand a trial and serve a sentence. I don't want him to escape that, even by death."

"What, sir, are you an officer?"

"I am one of the Boston inspectors!" replied Sheridan Keene.

"Well, sir, there's none braver!" cried the surgeon, with a quick display of honest admiration and approval.

Then he hastened to the side of the moaning man on the floor, and fell to making an examination of his wounds.

They did not prove fatal. Fellows like Johnny Guile do not go under very easily, and two weeks after the episode upon the train the swindler came out of the hospital and was brought into court for trial.

He was not alone by any means. Both Malloy and Bill Baker were in the dock with him, and the evidence was so conclusive against one and all, that one and all pleaded guilty to the charges against them, in the hope of receiving a less severe sentence.

Malloy and Baker were let down with three years each.

But Johnny Guile, whose past record had been of the worst, and who was regarded as a far too clever and dangerous man to be at large, was convicted under the habitual criminal act, and bids fair to end his days behind prison bars.

In the satchel left in the train by the swindler were found the money-order books stolen from the M— post-office, to which they ultimately were returned.

And that, with the closing of the prison door upon his peculiar capability for swindling honest people, forever put an end to the hope of Johnny Guile in the paper gold mine, despite his threats, Sheridan Keene had cornered.

With the brilliant achievement, one of the most important ever made by the Boston police, we will take leave for the present of Sheridan Keene. With all his dangerous experiences, he is still as enthusiastic as ever over his chosen work, and continues to be the right-hand man of Chief Inspector Watts, both of whom will, no doubt, be heard from in future numbers of SHIELD WEEKLY.

THE END.

Next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 17) will continue this series of true detective stories, in which the celebrated detective, Chief O'Mara, of Pittsburg, will

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